Research Paper

Evaluation of Iranian EFL Teachers' Perceptions towards the Practices of Classroom Management

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Abstract

The present qualitative study made an attempt to evaluate the Iranian EFL teachers' perceptions towards the practices of classroom management. Since classroom management is a research area which plays a pivotal role in the quality of teaching, this contribution is of high importance and significance. In doing so, 20 English professors of language department of Azad university were selected through available sampling method. Data were gathered through a semi-structured interview and an open-ended questionnaire. The interview questions were developed based on the literature review which was carried out by the researchers. The researchers recorded the participants' responses for further in-depth analysis. As the results indicated, some practices were extracted from the data which are response to students' misbehavior, class communication, fulfillment of learner expectations, time management, showing care and attention to learners, giving and receiving feedback, interaction with students' family, showing flexibility, showing accountability and commitment, planning lessons, planning group works, and professional ethics. The results can be used in teacher preparation programs for classroom management in the future. The results may also increase the width and breadth of knowledge of classroom management of those interested in this topic.

Key Words: Classroom Management, Teachers' Perception, Classroom Management Practices, EFL Context.

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Introduction

Classroom management can be considered as a significant and necessary part of the process of EFL teaching and learning and "refers to the methods, strategies and skills teachers use to maintain a classroom environment that results in a student's learning success" (Lemlech, 2001, p. 12). Classroom management is a concept used by educators to describe the method of ensuring the smooth operation of classroom lessons. In traditional theory, the aim of classroom management was primarily focused on achieving class control and order. That is, teachers' ability to coordinate classrooms and control the actions of their students is essential to producing effective educational results (Hildenbrand, 2017). Even though effective performance management doesn't really offer crucial instruction, it provides a contextual atmosphere that makes good instruction possible (Oliver & Reschly, 2007). This suggests that management of the classroom was seen as separate from teaching in the classroom. However, some research showed that management and teaching is not separate, but is increasingly interdependent and complicated (Erwin, 2004).

Research has recently shifted away from an emphasis on behavior management and looks instead at the efforts of teachers to develop, enforce, and sustain a learning atmosphere within the classroom. Management creates the conditions for students to be interested in learning or participating, and then provides frameworks, methods and activities to promote quality learning and performance (Erwin, 2004). This change also illustrates the involvement and obligation of students in the classroom management process. Although teachers are the guiding force in classroom management, students also have accountability in this field, state Marzano et al. (2003). Therefore, a classroom in which the teacher gives maximum responsibility for directing the actions of students constitutes a different educational atmosphere than one in which students are motivated and taught to take responsibility for the actions of themselves. Indeed, classroom management is of a serious function in the teaching-learning process. Migliarini and Annamma (2020) in their critical race theory noted that classroom management could function significantly in shaping ideas among people from diverse intellectual and racial back-grounds and this is the perspective of the teacher which energizes such a movement. Therefore, they argue that training potential teachers in terms of classroom management to create a learning atmosphere that promotes positive social interactions and active involvement in learning, focuses on building unity rather than management in the classroom is of high importance.

Teaching, since it has a lot of dimensions and obstacles, is a very complex activity. Classroom management is one of the main obstacles that teachers face. For teachers, especially inexperienced ones, it is hard. Wenby and Lane (2019) noted that to be a proficient or competent English person is a huge help, but this by itself does not guarantee you a successful teacher with regard to teaching English. There are other fields of experience that are of vital interest to educators. This secret lies in the management of classrooms. For several years, learners and educators alike have attempted to find the keys of effective

teaching, according to Wragg (2003) without the ability to effectively manage a class, any other attributes that teachers have should be neutralized. Therefore, one of the most significant techniques contributing to successful language courses is successful class leadership.

Clearly, we cannot separate classroom management from other learning activities. For example, Snyder (2003) notes that good teaching is not a distinct mechanism isolated from of the normal life of learning. Furthermore, Zukas and Malcolm (2007) examine some perspectives on academic excellence in higher education and its role of the educator as a disciplined actor; they argue that, as they are inseparable, discipline is essential to teaching methods. Tassell (2004) pointed out that if the teacher never takes a student to the social worker or the office, authorities are satisfied and view this as evidence that the teacher is in charge and doing a great job. Good classroom management, having different dimensions, such as dealing with student misbehavior and establishing rules, is a goal of teachers because it is regarded as a requirement for effective teaching and learning. For EFL classroom and the EFL teachers, disciplinary method and behavioral expectations are central to this system. Based on the students' age, situation, classroom purposes, and unexpected conditions, the managerial style of instructors may change to assist students in the development of self-guided learning. Although every teacher will have a unique style of management to meet each class's needs, the same elements can be found consistently (Cafferata & Gonzalez, 2013). As the previous studies indicated, teachers' perceptions have not been studied as much as students' perceptions so far. Regarding the above discussions, the present study was done to evaluate the EFL teachers' perceptions towards the classroom management.

Research question

What are Iranian EFL teachers' perceptions towards the practices of classroom management?

Literature Review

Akbari and Yazdanmehr (2015) investigated how expert teachers could manage their class and keep its discipline. To this aim, 20 teachers were selected through convenience sampling methods. Since they were directly dealing with teachers as trainers, supervisors, and mentors, they were considered as qualified informants. Some themes were extracted from the content analysis of the interviews, including expert teachers' identification power, use of external control, use of preventive management strategies, monitoring student behavior, clarification of expectations, use of body language and establishing rules and routines.

Mohammad Rezaee (2016) studied the comparative effect of verbal and nonverbal communication cues on the EFL successful classroom management in the Iranian context. In order to conduct the study 60 female learners in a high school in Tehran were selected as the main participant of the study through available sampling. The results of the quantitative data, teacher's self-reports, and interviews were taken into consideration to discuss various aspects of using

verbal and nonverbal communication cues in the EFL classroom and their respective effects on the classroom management. The results of qualitative data analysis revealed that both VCCs and NVCs aided with improving positive behaviors in the EFL classrooms. The participants in the VCCs group significantly outperformed the subjects in the NVCs group. Therefore, the obvious conclusion is that the devised treatment has helped both teacher and the participants in the VC group to perform better than the NVC group in which the learners relied on gestures, postures, mimics, and body language solely.

Voss et al. (2017) argued that teachers' interest in a well- managed class would affect the learner's success in the classroom. Therefore, class management and the way teachers employ specific strategies to manage their classes surely help learners improve their own abilities in different aspects. Classroom management strategies would impact different aspects of an educational program including, 1) the curriculum used, 2) the sources of learners' accountability, and 3) the input the learners receive. In this respect, another study conducted by Gage et al. (2018) focused on the relationship between the actions teachers take in the classroom and the learners' activities in a primary school. They found that the strategies teachers develop and the choice they make in the process of CM would take effect from both teachers' beliefs and learners' views concerning the objectives of the course and their willingness to take part in the classroom management procedures.

Chichermir et al. (2020) investigated the classroom management in EFL classes and sought for the perception of the EFL students about this concept in China and Russia. They implemented a 3-point Likert scale questionnaire at both Chinese and Russian universities. The results revealed that generally, the perception of classroom management between Chinese and Russian respondents had more similarities than distinctions. Chichermir et al. (2020) proposed that understanding differences in perception of Chinese and Russian respondents at universities are helpful for teaching staff and students to understand each other's expectation, as well as stimulating new or modified strategies of classroom management.

Akbarzade Farkhani et al. (2022) sought to understand the perceptions of classroom management and teaching self-efficacy by Iranian EFL teachers during the Covid-19 pandemic. Concerning sampling, 100 male and female English teachers constituted the study sample. Data were collected via Online Teaching Self–efficacy Inventory questionnaire through different online platforms. The findings reflected that EFL teachers could select appropriate classroom management during online and face-to-face classes. In addition, the teachers had a positive attitude toward managing the classroom during the Covid-19 pandemic. In another context, Aliakbar et al. (2023) explored Iranian EFL teachers' classroom assessment practices following the new curriculum reform. A total of 28 EFL teachers at public high schools from three provinces in Iran participated in the semi-structured interviews. After transcribing the interviews, recurrent themes were identified by thematic analysis. The results revealed that English teachers used primarily assessment for learning or formative assessment, yet their assessments were still exam-based. The findings

revealed that there is a discrepancy between teachers' classroom assessment practices and the curriculum reform. Across gender, there was a significant difference between participants in terms of role play, assigning summaries of lessons, and playing audio files. Regarding teaching experience and academic degree, there was no significant difference between participants

Methodology

Since the main objective of the present study is to explore the EFL teachers' perceptions towards the classroom management, qualitative research method was used as a design of this research. It should be noted that the present research was designed to assess the Iranian EFL teachers views through a semi-structured interview and open-ended questions. The target statistical population of the study included the professors of Kerman Azad university. In fact, 20 English professors (8 males and 12 females) of literature and language department participated in the present qualitative study via available sampling method. It is one of the major forms of nonprobability sampling which was applied in the current research. Probability sampling is the ideal, but in practice, available sampling would be all that is available to the researcher (Ary et al., 2014). They were Ph.D. holders in TEFL with more than 10 years of teaching experience. This group participated in the semi-structured interview and filled an open-ended questionnaire so that the researchers can evaluate their perceptions towards classroom management.

As mentioned earlier, a semi-structured interview in five open-ended questions was used to uncover the Iranian EFL teachers' perceptions of the classroom management. It was conducted in one-to-one format in English. The interview questions were developed based on the literature review. The researchers carried out the interviews themselves, which lasted around 35 to 45 minutes and audio recorded them for further in-depth analysis. To block the occurrence of any bias in the interviews, they were implemented using Strauss and Corbin' s (1998) approach with moving from general questions to more specific questions. Then, the transcribed interviews and the participants' responses to the questions were read precisely and repeatedly by the researchers and exposed to coding stages using constant comparative method of analysis. Moreover, the dependability and credibility of the interview data were checked. After that, the researchers developed an open-ended questionnaire based on a thorough literature review and the results of the interviews to triangulate the collected data. Then, the participants received the questionnaire and finally the data were gathered and analyzed through thematic analysis using MAXQDA.

It should be noted that the qualitative thematic analysis was done in the following steps: In the first step, the researchers got familiar with the data, and reviewed the collected data. In the second step, data coding was done. In this step, some words, phrases or sentences in the data were made bold or highlighted so that some codes could be extracted as representations of the content of the bold or highlighted data. In the third step, the extracted codes were meticulously reviewed to extract the recurrent patterns in them and extract the recurrent themes through merging the relevant and similar codes and

removing the non-relevant codes. In the fourth step, the extracted themes were reviewed by the researchers to ensure about their accuracy and usefulness. To this end, the researchers returned to the data to compare the themes against them. If any problems were identified with the themes, they were broken down, combined, or omitted. In sum, in this step, the researchers tried to make themes more useful and accurate.

Research Findings

With regard to the research question, "What are Iranian EFL teachers' practices of classroom management? several themes were extracted which are shown in Table 1 along with the strategies to implement the practices.

Table 1: Iranian EFL teachers' perceptions of classroom management

Practices	Strategies
Response to students' misbehavior	Managing naughty students, Managing students with misbehavior, Managing students' aggression Managing students' inattention to assignments
Class communication	Managing teacher-students interaction Managing student-student interaction
Fulfillment of learner expectations	Managing learners' expectations, Managing students' wants, Managing students' needs, Managing students' priorities
Time management	Managing time of classroom
Showing care & attention to learners	Showing support to students Showing empathy to students Showing sympathy to students Showing care to students Showing attention to students
Giving & receiving feedback	Giving conducive feedback on students' learning, Giving feedback on students' behavior and performance; Receiving feedback from students on teaching methods Receiving feedback from students on class behaviors
Interaction with students' family	Being in regular contact with students' family Being informed of students' family background
Showing flexibility	Being flexible in teaching, Being flexible in evaluation, Being flexible in class interaction
Showing accountability & commitment	Being accountable and committed to students Being accountable and committed to students' families, Being accountable and committed to authorities

Planning lessons	Preparing lesson plans before coming to the class
Planning group works	Taking advantage of group activities in the class Taking advantage of group tasks in the class
Following professional ethics	Teaching based on professional ethics Behaving based on professional ethics

Quotations confirming these strategies were provided briefly in the sections on the results of the research question.

The first practice in the above table was response to students' misbehavior. This referred to managing naughty students, students with misbehavior, and students' aggression and inattention to assignments. The following excerpts support this:

Nasiri: *Managing naughty students is a necessary element of classroom management. They make class leadership a daunting task. They should be managed skillfully.*

Hashemi: *Students' misbehavior should be managed to improve teaching effectiveness. Dealing with this requires patience and experience.*

Ebrahimi: *Some students are aggressive. Some others do not do class assignments. Classroom management involves managing these students in appropriate ways.*

Class communication was the second practice shown in the Table 1. This practice reflected managing teacher-students and student-student interaction. This is illustrated in the following excerpts:

Taban: *Unfortunately, crowded classes are common in Iran. In such situations, classroom interaction management is a big art for teachers. Teachers should make their best to handle their interaction with students and interaction among students.*

Tavakoli*: Teachers should know how to manage the classroom relations. If classroom is well managed in this regard, higher effectiveness can be expected.*

Mohebbi: *Students learn more effectively in a setting where communications are good. Balance is very significant in class interaction. Over attention to some students and ignoring others do not make a good classroom.*

The Table 1 shows that the third practice was fulfillment of learner expectations. This referred to managing learners' expectations, wants, needs, and priorities. The following excerpts elaborate this:

Hemmati: *Classroom management cannot be separated from fulfillment of students' needs. Students have a variety of needs in English learning, which should be met by education.*

Kaveh: *Classroom management is not achieved just by going to the class and presenting some instructions. Teachers should be aware of these needs and attempt to meet them.*

Ahmadi: *Teachers' success in classroom management is tied to students' preferences. If teachers are indifferent to students' priorities, they do not gain remarkable results.*

Time management was the fourth practice demonstrated in the table. This is well-reflected in the excerpts given below:

Haghighi: *As a teacher, I should manage the time of class skillfully. As the first step, I should enter and exit school in time, so that time arrangement is not disturbed.*

Rahimi: *Management of time is of importance in classroom management. It is important for a teacher to be able to think of as many ideas and words as possible in a short period of time.*

Gorji: *Time limitations is a big concern for many teachers in managing the classroom. If we can't learn to manage time, we have put a side a big block in the path of classroom management.*

As documented by the table, the fifth practice was showing care and attention to learners. This referred to showing support, empathy, sympathy, care, and attention to learners. The following excerpts are proof of this:

Nasiri: *To manage classroom, teachers should like all students. They should care them, show empathy towards them. teachers should see students as their friends.*

Zarei: *Teachers, to be successful in classroom management, should try to solve some emotional problems of students directly and indirectly. They should not be indifferent to their students.*

Mohammadi: *Teachers should cause students feel togetherness by giving them affection. Generally speaking, friendly and supportive relations with students play an important role in classroom management.*

The sixth practice, as shown in the Table 1, was giving and receiving feedback. This illustrated giving conducive feedback to students' learning, behavior and performance; and receiving feedback from students on teaching methods and class behaviors. The following excerpts demonstrate this:

Karimi: *Classroom management involves giving feedback regarding their learning and class behaviors. Teachers should also receive feedback from students on their teaching performance.*

Mansouri: *Part of classroom management is giving and receiving feedback. Students should receive feedback from teachers about their learning. Teachers should also receive feedback from students on their teaching and the way they behave in the class.*

Pakdaman: *Managerial skills of teachers are linked to their skills in giving and taking feedback. In this way, their classes are better managed in the future.*

The seventh practice was interaction with students' family and referred to teachers' regular contact with students' family. The proof of this is the following excerpts:

Karami: *I try to be regularly in relation with my students' family. This is to be aware of students' life conditions outside the classroom and manage them better in the classroom.*

Rahimi: *Teachers should be in contact with the family of students. Background of students must be known to teachers. Otherwise, classroom management may not be done successfully.*

Taheri: *I let the students' family know about educational and behavior state of their children in the classroom. Moreover, I become more informed of their life conditions. This helps me in managing them in the classroom.*

Showing flexibility was the eighth practice. This practice meant being flexible in teaching, evaluation, and class interaction. This is understood by the following excerpts:

Taban: *Classroom management has affinity with flexibility. We should be flexible in all dimensions of the class including teaching and evaluation methods.*

Kaveh: *Flexibility is an advantage in classroom management. In some classes, a teaching procedure may be effective that has proved to be ineffective in other classes.*

The ninth practice in the Table was showing accountability and commitment. Strategies to implement this practice was being accountable and committed to students and their families, and authorities. The following excerpts support this:

Naderi: *Managing the classroom has several components including teacher accountability and commitment. Students ask us to be accountable and we should account for the affairs to them. This sense of commitment completes the puzzle of classroom management.*

Jaberi: *Responsibility and commitment to students, authorities and even families is of importance in classroom management. When teachers know about their responsibilities and remain committed to them, they can manage classroom more efficiently.*

The tenth practice displayed in the Table 1 was planning lessons. This referred to preparing lesson plans before coming to the class. The following excerpts make this clear:

Rezaei: *Planning lessons is the most inevitable dimension of classroom management. I prepare lesson plans before the class. It helps me understand learning activities exactly.*

Karami: *Lesson plans is a necessary aspect of classroom management. It deeply contributes to more successful classroom management. It also helps time management.*

The eleventh practice in the table was planning group works. Strategies to implement this practice were taking advantage of group activities in the class and taking advantage of group tasks in the class. The following excerpts support this:

Ebrahimi: *Classroom management involves arranging group activities and practices. Students should be classified into some groups to work with each other and learn about group targets.*

Ghaderi: *Teacher should plan class activities which require grouping students to work with each other. This introduces the culture of group thinking and working to the students.*

The twelfth practice mentioned in the table was following professional ethics. This practice was associated with the strategies of teaching based on professional ethics and behaving based on professional ethics. The following excerpts illustrate this:

Rezaei: *I do not neglect professional moral issues in classroom management. I try to build my teaching based on teaching morality.*

Fatemi: *Professional ethics play a main role in managing the classes. To comply with this, I regulate my behavior with students according to ethics of teaching. I avoid any discrimination.*

Zarei: *I'm very rigid in observing ethics in my work. Exaggeration on praising some students and punishing some others is a clear example of unethical behavior of a teacher.*

Discussion and conclusion

On analyzing the research question, the following practices were extracted from the data: Response to students' misbehavior, class communication, fulfillment of learner expectations, time management, showing care and attention to learners, giving and receiving feedback, interaction with students' family, showing flexibility, showing accountability and commitment, planning lessons, planning group works, and following professional ethics. The results are congruent with Danielson's (2007; 2013) framework of teaching at 'classroom environment' level where she addresses management components and elements by referring to 'management of instructional groups', 'management of materials and supplies', management of student behavior, and management of transitions.

Resorting to Li' s (2017) argument that teaching expertise is the product of taking many factors into account, the above findings can be justified. According to Li (2017), teaching practice cannot be successful in the absence of paying heed to diverse classroom dimensions including students and their behaviors, interaction, responsibility, professionalism, class time, etc. Similarly, Blömeke and Delaney (2012), Forkosh-Baruch, Phillips, and Smits (2021), Mohamad, Yee, Tee, Ibrahim Mukhtar, and Ahmad (2019) emphasized that teachers' professional management is the result of cognitive abilities and affective characteristics. In addition, it can be argued that behind the logic of teachers' classroom management lay a set of factors which may not be evident from superficial view.

The themes extracted in this study for EFL teachers' practices of classroom management can unravel the fact that to deal with the classroom situation, teachers should analyze and synthesize many issues at the same time. In the class leadership, teachers are guided by many factors' flexibility, accountability, and response to learners are just some of them. In sum, classroom management, like knowledge resources of classroom management, is a multifaceted and dynamic construct in the formation of which many factors should come into play.

The conclusions of the present research can be drawn from the results on EFL teachers' perceptions on the classroom management. First, it can be concluded that classroom management is multidimensional and simultaneous and that EFL teachers are involved in the constant process. The variety of knowledge and practices identified for teachers' classroom management are proof for this deduction. Moreover, classroom management literacy is not formed overnight but it is the product of various knowledge domains. That is to say, classroom management literacy is the outcome of a series of practices which contribute to teachers' skillfulness in classroom management. Additionally, it can be said that classroom management literacy is the output of merging knowledge resources and practices of classroom management, each branched into a set of strategies. This collection makes a whole called classroom management literacy through a set of relations and interrelations that are there among them.

The results of this study may increase the width and breadth of knowledge of classroom management of those interested in this topic. Since classroom

management is a research area which plays a pivotal role in the quality of EFL teaching, this contribution is of high importance and significance. The results may add to the knowledge base of EFL teacher classroom management by making EFL teachers and teacher educators more aware of the ways in which they can operationalize a theoretical concept (i.e., classroom management) in real teaching situations. In this way, a more practical and vivid view of EFL teacher classroom management is presented to EFL teaching circles who seek more clarity in such areas of teaching as classroom management. EFL teacher education researchers can also benefit from the findings and replicate this study in similar situations with varying aspects so that triangulation is achieved and the findings of this study are more validated. They can also touch the gaps of the present study and tackle the missed issues of the present study to add to the richness of research on EFL teacher classroom management. Finally, TEFL policy makers and top authorities can use the findings of the present study to complete the theoretical bases of teacher education in the realm of classroom management, and take appropriate measures to incorporate these changes in teacher education system of Iran. Given that EFL teacher education system of Iran is relatively static, this can revise its nature and transform its agendas.

As the limitations, the number of male and female teachers participating in the present study might not concordant with the male-female ratio of the population of EFL teachers in Iran. Also, the data on this ratio is not accessible; therefore, the gender ratio within the sample of the study may act as an intervening variable. The last one backs to the personality traits of the EFL teachers who take part in the study. It is likely that their individual characteristics intervene their perspective toward classroom management actions and consequently affect their perceptions concerning classroom management.

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